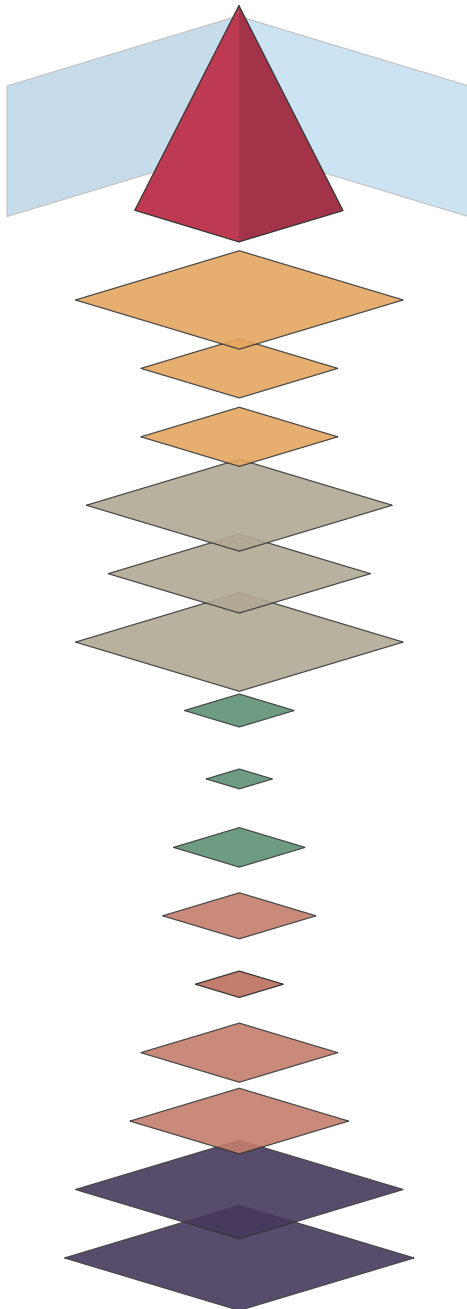
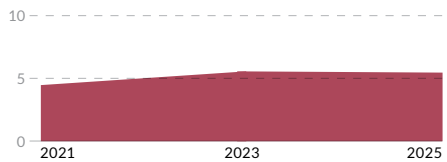


 **MOLDOVA**



5.53 $\searrow 0.07$
CRIMINALITY SCORE

75th of 193 countries $\searrow 6$
13th of 44 European countries $\searrow 1$
8th of 17 Central and Eastern European countries -



CRIMINAL MARKETS **4.97** $\searrow 0.23$

HUMAN TRAFFICKING	7.50	0.00
HUMAN SMUGGLING	4.50	0.00
EXTORTION & PROTECTION RACKETEERING	4.50	$\searrow 1.00$
ARMS TRAFFICKING	7.00	$\searrow 0.50$
TRADE IN COUNTERFEIT GOODS	6.00	$\nearrow 1.00$
ILLCIT TRADE IN EXCISABLE GOODS	7.50	0.00
FLORA CRIMES	2.50	$\searrow 0.50$
FAUNA CRIMES	1.50	$\searrow 0.50$
NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES	3.00	$\searrow 1.00$
HEROIN TRADE	3.50	0.00
COCAINE TRADE	2.00	$\searrow 0.50$
CANNABIS TRADE	4.50	$\searrow 0.50$
SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE	5.00	0.00
CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES	7.50	0.00
FINANCIAL CRIMES	8.00	0.00



CRIMINAL ACTORS **6.10** $\nearrow 0.10$

MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS	5.00	0.00
CRIMINAL NETWORKS	5.00	0.00
STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS	8.00	0.00
FOREIGN ACTORS	5.50	$\nearrow 0.50$
PRIVATE SECTOR ACTORS	7.00	0.00



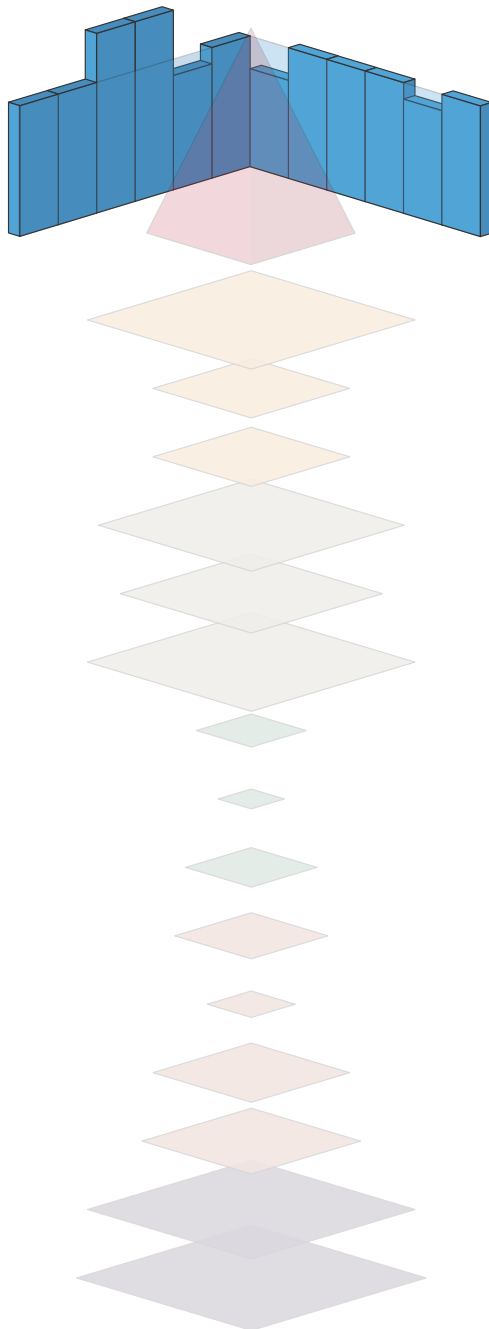
This project was funded in part by a grant from the United States Department of State.



Funded by the European Union

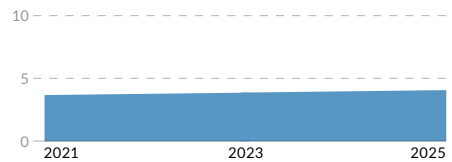
ENACT is funded by the European Union and implemented by the Institute for Security Studies and INTERPOL, in affiliation with the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime.

 **MOLDOVA**



 **4.08** $\nearrow 0.16$
RESILIENCE SCORE

126th of 193 countries $\nearrow 10$
41st of 44 European countries -
14th of 17 Central and Eastern European countries -



<u>POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE</u>	4.00	0.00
<u>GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY</u>	4.00	0.00
<u>INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION</u>	5.50	$\nearrow 0.50$
<u>NATIONAL POLICIES AND LAWS</u>	5.50	$\nearrow 0.50$
<u>JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND DETENTION</u>	3.50	$\nearrow 0.50$
<u>LAW ENFORCEMENT</u>	4.00	0.00
<u>TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY</u>	3.00	$\searrow 0.50$
<u>ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING</u>	4.00	$\nearrow 0.50$
<u>ECONOMIC REGULATORY CAPACITY</u>	4.00	0.00
<u>VICTIM AND WITNESS SUPPORT</u>	4.00	0.00
<u>PREVENTION</u>	3.50	$\nearrow 0.50$
<u>NON-STATE ACTORS</u>	4.00	0.00



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CRIMINALITY

CRIMINAL MARKETS

PEOPLE

Moldova's strategic location at the edge of the EU positions it as a critical hub for human trafficking, primarily for labour and sexual exploitation. Vulnerable populations, including refugees fleeing the war in Ukraine, are at heightened risk. More than 750 000 refugees, predominantly women and children, have crossed into Moldova, with over 100 000 remaining as of early 2023. Traffickers exploit these groups, particularly at border checkpoints. Reports indicate that Ukrainian women have begun engaging in prostitution in Chişinău, organized by pimps, a phenomenon that was previously uncommon in Moldova. Moldovan women and children are also trafficked for sexual exploitation in Romania and Western Europe, while Moldovan men are targeted for labour exploitation under false promises of well-paying jobs. The cost-of-living crisis and economic hardships have exacerbated vulnerabilities, making more individuals susceptible to traffickers. The methods employed by traffickers have evolved, with an increasing reliance on social media and online communication for recruitment. While traditional 'lover boy' tactics and coercion persist, traffickers are becoming more cautious of legal repercussions, prompting some to reduce overt violence and reliance on fictitious debts. Reports indicate that sex trafficking now often manifests as non-violent pimping, where victims are lured abroad with promises of higher earnings and willingly participate under exploitative conditions. Child exploitation remains a significant concern, particularly in the realm of online child pornography, which is sometimes used as a grooming tool for trafficking. Children from orphanages, abandoned children and those from the Roma community are particularly at risk, with reports of forced child labour in agriculture, construction and hospitality sectors.

Smuggling networks exploit border vulnerabilities to transport conscription-aged men out of Ukraine, often passing through Transnistria before arriving in Moldova. Moldova acts as a transit country, with migrants from Asia and Africa also utilizing it as a gateway to the EU. Criminal networks employ document fraud to facilitate these movements, with smuggling routes spanning multiple countries, including Austria, Bulgaria, Greece, Hungary and Serbia.

Extortion and protection racketeering are present in Moldova, although not widespread. These crimes are primarily linked to organized criminal groups and business executives, though they occur only in isolated cases throughout the country.

TRADE

Moldova plays a role in arms trafficking, particularly as a transit country for weapons moving out of Ukraine. Despite international efforts to curb illicit arms flows, reports suggest that some weapons supplied to Ukraine have been diverted to the black market, with Moldova serving as a key route. Furthermore, some reports indicate that Moldova also illegally resells weapons it receives from international partners. The breakaway region of Transnistria remains a major security concern, housing significant stockpiles of Cold War-era ammunition and Russian troops. Additionally, investigations have linked Moldova to the illicit procurement of high-tech weapon components, including drone technology.

Moldova serves as a transit country for counterfeit goods, with smuggling routes primarily linked to Ukraine. Counterfeit clothing, cosmetics, medicines and counterfeit tobacco products transit Moldova enroute to the EU. Cigarette smuggling represents one of the largest illicit industries, with significant volumes moving from Moldova into Romania and beyond. The Transnistrian region, which operates outside the control of the Moldovan government, reportedly plays a central role in these activities, using profits from smuggling to corrupt law enforcement in Moldova, Ukraine and Romania.

Illicit trade in excise goods, particularly tobacco, remains a persistent issue. Cigarette smuggling manifests in various forms, ranging from small-scale trafficking to large consignments transported clandestinely. In recent years, there has been a marked increase in cigarette smuggling, particularly along Moldova's borders with Ukraine and Romania. Grocery stores serve as a major distribution channel for illegal tobacco. Alcohol smuggling is also an issue, with reports indicating that up to 40% of alcoholic products in Moldova's restaurants are illicit. Proposed tax increases have raised concerns that smuggling activities could escalate further. The tobacco industry reports that while illegal cigarette consumption in Moldova is on the rise, it remains relatively limited. Nevertheless, significant outflows of cigarettes from Moldova to Romania have been observed.

ENVIRONMENT

Despite the low forest coverage, flora crimes in Moldova primarily involve illegal logging, although recent data indicates a decline in such activities. Private companies are the main perpetrators, frequently exceeding their authorized quotas. In comparison to Romania, Moldova's illegal logging market is considerably smaller. International support, particularly from the US and the EU, has been mobilized to combat these forest crimes.

Fauna crimes do not represent a significant market in Moldova. While past reports have associated Moldova with black caviar trafficking, there is currently no evidence in support of such activities. Nevertheless, authorities continue to monitor the situation. Poaching remains a concern; however, there is no evidence of organized crime involvement.

Non-renewable resource crimes are minimal; however, they present a potential risk due to Moldova's geographic location. Moldova functions as both a source and a transit point for illicit fuel smuggling, particularly towards Serbia. If the war in Ukraine continues, Moldova's involvement in regional fuel smuggling is likely to increase.

DRUGS

Moldova has historically been a transit country for heroin, with criminal groups using it as a storage hub. The ongoing war in Ukraine has disrupted traditional trafficking routes, resulting in an increased flow of heroin through Moldova. Reports indicate that some Turkish-Kurdish networks have established businesses in Moldova to facilitate the heroin trade into the EU. Cocaine trafficking in Moldova remains limited due to the high cost of the drug. Although there are reports of Moldovan ports being utilized as entry points for cocaine shipments, there is no concrete evidence to support the existence of large-scale trafficking operations. Cannabis is the most prevalent drug in Moldova, with the country acting as a domestic source. While law enforcement regularly conducts seizures, the scale of production does not indicate significant international involvement. Moldova does not play a major role in transnational cannabis trafficking. Synthetic drugs, particularly amphetamines, represent an expanding criminal market. Moldova functions as both a source and transit point for synthetic drugs, with precursors frequently seized. Recent operations have successfully thwarted significant quantities of synthetic drugs from reaching destinations within the EU. The synthetic drug trade in Moldova has increasingly embraced 'darknet' and 'dead drop' distribution models, complicating enforcement efforts.

CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES

Cyber-dependent crimes are prevalent in Moldova, with cyberattacks persisting. Criminals employ various malware techniques, including ransomware, to target both businesses and individuals – a notable case involved Moldovan hackers who developed a botnet that infected thousands of computers globally. Additionally, state-affiliated cybercriminals have been active, with Russian-linked groups conducting cyberattacks against the Moldovan government infrastructure.

FINANCIAL CRIMES

Financial crimes continue to be a significant issue in Moldova, characterized by widespread corruption and tax evasion. Organized crime groups and state-embedded actors are deeply involved in financial fraud, as evidenced by several high-profile cases involving wealthy individuals often with political power. Additionally, there are cases of large-scale tax evasion operations. Moldova's involvement in regional financial crime raises concerns as the country seeks EU membership.

CRIMINAL ACTORS

Mafia-style groups in Moldova are largely composed of Soviet-era organized crime structures, particularly the so-called 'thieves in law.' These groups operate within a hierarchical structure and wield considerable political and economic influence. One of the most prominent forms of organized crime in Moldova is the 'Prison Gangs,' which engage in a wide array of illegal activities and have deep-rooted connections to corruption and money laundering. These groups often exploit political connections to launder illicit proceeds through their representatives in business and government. The 'Shor Group' and 'Plahotniuc Group' have been identified as key players in such activities, with allegations of involvement in efforts to destabilize the political landscape. Transnistria, a breakaway region with limited oversight from the Moldovan government, remains a stronghold for organized crime, particularly in illicit arms trafficking and contraband activities. While not entirely controlled by mafia groups, Transnistria offers a safe haven for criminal actors due to its weak regulatory environment and suspected high-level government collusion with organized crime.

Moldova is home to a range of loosely organized criminal networks engaged in various illicit activities, such as human trafficking, drug trafficking, cigarette smuggling, arms trafficking and financial crimes. These networks frequently collaborate with foreign counterparts, particularly those from Eastern Europe. Law enforcement operations have successfully dismantled several of these groups, including a Moldovan-French criminal network implicated in large-scale financial fraud. However, many of these networks operate with flexible structures, which complicates efforts to track and dismantle them.

Corruption within Moldova's political and judicial systems continues to enable organized crime. State-embedded actors have been directly linked to financial crimes, money laundering and large-scale fraud. High-profile cases include corruption charges against several former government officials implicated in a fraudulent concession deal that resulted in significant financial losses for the state. Moldova has also observed occasions where state actors have enabled criminal operations through bribery schemes. These recent cases, along with other instances of officials facilitating the

removal of individuals from international watchlists and the broader involvement of political elites in fraudulent activities, highlight the deeply rooted nature of corruption. Despite recent efforts by the current administration to combat corruption, the legacy of state involvement in financial and organized crime remains a challenge.

Foreign criminal actors play a significant role in Moldova's organized crime landscape. Notable groups include the Russian mafia, the Georgian mafia and criminal syndicates from Romania and Türkiye. These actors engage in a range of illicit activities, such as drug trafficking, human trafficking and cigarette smuggling. Clan conflicts between rival foreign criminal groups have also been reported, with a notable incident in 2024 when a leader of a Turkish criminal group was assassinated in Chişinău, triggering a wave of retaliatory killings in cities across Europe. While foreign groups do not fully control any specific criminal markets in Moldova, they exert considerable influence, particularly in cyber-dependent crimes. The involvement of Ukrainian and Russian diaspora networks in human trafficking along the Moldova–Ukraine border has intensified since the onset of the war in Ukraine. Additionally, law enforcement

has reported interactions between Moldovan networks and criminal organizations from Italy, France, Romania and Montenegro, further underscoring the country's significance in transnational organized crime.

Private-sector actors play a significant role in facilitating organized crime in Moldova, particularly through financial crimes and smuggling operations. Legal business entities, including real estate firms, cryptocurrency exchanges and offshore banking institutions, are often used as fronts for money laundering and other illicit financial activities. The banking sector has historically been a key enabler of financial crimes. One of the most influential private-sector actors is the Transnistrian holding company 'Sheriff,' which controls an estimated 60% of Transnistria's economy. Sheriff not only dominates economic activity in the breakaway region but also exerts political influence, benefiting from Moldova's limited governance in the area. These cases highlight the extent to which private-sector actors contribute to Moldova's organized crime landscape by facilitating illicit financial transactions and shielding criminal proceeds from law enforcement scrutiny.

RESILIENCE

LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

Moldova's political leadership operates within a parliamentary representative democratic framework, with a prime minister at the helm of the government and a multi-party system governing legislative power. Although the judiciary is formally independent, persistent concerns regarding its impartiality remain. In recent years, Moldova has made significant strides to align with EU standards, following the attainment of its candidate status in 2022 and the decision to open accession negotiations in 2023. Legislative and institutional reforms have focused on enhancing judicial integrity, combating corruption and addressing organized crime. However, the government's primary focus remains on EU accession and countering Russian influence, rather than specifically addressing organized crime. Observers have noted that Moldova's elections are competitive and generally well administered, yet concerns persist regarding media bias, oversight of campaign financing and mechanisms for resolving electoral disputes. The influence of external actors in Moldovan politics remains pronounced, particularly as political parties receive financial support from foreign sources. The 2024 EU referendum and presidential elections highlighted Moldova's deeply divided electorate, with allegations of Russian interference further undermining trust in the democratic

process. Additionally, Moldova faces hybrid threats, including cyberattacks and disinformation campaigns, which exacerbate social instability.

Corruption remains a significant obstacle to Moldova's governance, permeating multiple sectors, including law enforcement, customs, public procurement and the judiciary. Notable efforts have been made to strengthen anti-corruption mechanisms, including legislative amendments that expand whistle-blower protections and strengthen institutions such as the National Anticorruption Centre. The government is also moving forward with plans for an Anticorruption Court; however, jurisdictional fragmentation and unclear political interests continue to hinder progress. While government transparency has improved under the current administration, public access to policy documents and draft legislation remains inconsistent.

Moldova actively participates in international cooperation initiatives to combat organized crime and is a signatory to multiple UN conventions and regional agreements. Collaboration with Europol, Frontex and regional law enforcement bodies has been instrumental in tackling human trafficking, drug trafficking and illicit financial flows. Additionally, Moldova has expanded its security cooperation

with the EU, NATO and regional cybercrime agencies. However, external geopolitical pressures, particularly from Russia, continue to pose significant security risks.

Moldova has established a legislative framework to address various criminal markets, including drug and arms trafficking. Nevertheless, gaps persist in areas such as human trafficking laws, which do not adequately distinguish between trafficking and smuggling, along with a lack of specific legal provisions aimed at addressing environmental crimes. Recent initiatives include asset recovery programs and revised arms legislation that align with EU standards. Additionally, Moldova has introduced a national cybersecurity law set to take effect in 2025, further strengthening its resilience to cyber threats.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

Moldova's judicial system continues to grapple with issues of corruption, inefficiency and a backlog of cases. Despite reforms aimed at enhancing judicial independence and integrity, concerns persist regarding undue political influence, selective justice and inconsistencies in the application of case law. Efforts to improve transparency have included the implementation of an electronic case management system; however, access to case information remains limited, which impacts civil society oversight. Moldova has also faced criticism over its vetting procedures for judges, which have resulted in significant resignations and accusations of political interference. The penitentiary system is characterized by overcrowded facilities, poor sanitation and allegations of mistreatment. While Moldova has received praise for its harm reduction programs within prisons, offering HIV prevention and opioid replacement therapies, staff shortages and reliance on informal inmate hierarchies continue to pose systemic challenges.

Moldova's law enforcement agencies, including the General Police Inspectorate and the Carabinieri, have undergone structural changes to enhance their operational capabilities. However, corruption and inefficiency continue to undermine public trust. Allegations of human rights violations, including police brutality, disproportionately impact marginalized groups, such as the Roma population. Recent initiatives, including funding from the US and EU to modernize investigative tools and train personnel, aim to address these shortcomings. Nevertheless, resource constraints and persistent structural weaknesses hinder progress.

Territorial integrity remains a challenge for Moldova due to its inability to exert control over the Transnistrian region, where Russian-backed authorities maintain a separate administration. Transnistria has long been associated with organized crime, particularly arms trafficking, and its status as an unrecognized entity hinders Moldova's ability to enforce its laws in the area. While Moldova's border management capabilities have improved, due to enhanced customs controls and international support, the ongoing

war in Ukraine has exacerbated smuggling risks, particularly regarding illicit tobacco, grain and narcotics trafficking. Cyber threats stemming from Russia's hybrid warfare, including disinformation campaigns and coordinated cyberattacks, continue to undermine Moldova's territorial integrity. The country's limited cybersecurity infrastructure heightens its vulnerability, with government institutions such as the Presidency, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Internal Affairs and the State Registry frequently targeted.

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Moldova continues to face significant risks associated with money laundering and illicit financial flows. While it has strengthened its anti-money laundering (AML) framework in cooperation with relevant international authorities, enforcement remains inconsistent. Criminal networks continue to exploit financial loopholes, and Moldova has not yet fully aligned with the Financial Action Task Force standards regarding virtual assets and financial transparency. Nevertheless, recent efforts to strengthen AML frameworks, asset recovery and financial crime prevention demonstrate Moldova's commitment to reform, despite ongoing challenges.

Although there has been progress in macroeconomic reforms, Moldova's regulatory environment remains difficult. Bureaucracy and a weak rule of law hinder business development, while the ongoing geopolitical crisis has further strained economic stability. The government has taken steps to implement reforms aimed at strengthening the country's institutions and improving its investment climate; however, corruption and inefficiencies continue to deter investment. Moldova remains one of Europe's poorest economies, heavily reliant on foreign aid and remittances.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Moldova has made notable strides in enhancing support services for victims and witnesses, particularly those affected by trafficking; however, challenges persist. A multidisciplinary referral system is in place; however, access to these services often depends on participation in legal proceedings. The government provides funding for several shelters dedicated to victims of human trafficking and gender-based violence. Nevertheless, rural areas continue to be underserved, and funding constraints necessitate reliance on NGOs and international organizations for supplementary support. Although harm reduction programs in prisons are well-regarded, broader drug treatment services remain limited.

Efforts to prevent organized crime, particularly human trafficking, have intensified through public awareness campaigns and cross-border cooperation initiatives. The government has partnered with the EU to enhance border security and combat illicit trade. However, Moldova has yet to address the demand for exploitative labour,

and enforcement mechanisms remain inconsistent. New cybersecurity initiatives aim to mitigate hybrid threats; however, Moldova remains vulnerable to Russian cyberattacks and disinformation campaigns.

Moldova's civil society sector is active but faces sustainability challenges due to limited domestic funding. Many NGOs rely heavily on foreign grants, which makes them vulnerable to allegations of external influence. In Transnistria, civil society organizations face severe restrictions, particularly those focused on human rights and democracy advocacy. While media freedoms have improved, journalists continue to face harassment, and pro-Kremlin disinformation remains a pervasive issue. Recent government actions to suspend Russian-affiliated media outlets have raised concerns about press freedom, despite ongoing efforts to combat foreign interference.

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